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Dora

## SANDOR RADO: THE JOVIAL AND WORLDLY SPY

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In mid-August 1981, in my office at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, I spotted in the *International Herald Tribune* an obituary taken from a brief Hungarian MTI release announcing the death of Sandor (Alexander) Rado in Budapest. Other newspapers in Europe and North America also carried a brief mention of the passing of Professor Doctor Sandor Rado, doctor of science, doctor of economics, fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of Great Britain, and co-president of the Hungarian Society of Geodesy and Cartography; but few obituaries alluded to Professor Rado's unusual role as a principal in a major intelligence drama during the Second World War.

I first learned about Rado in 1952 as a newly commissioned second lieutenant taking the Army's Counterintelligence Officer course. On the required reading list was a book, *Handbook for Spies*, by Alexander Foote, a Briton who had worked in the Soviet espionage network established by Rado in Switzerland.

Other post-war publications about Rado's activities provided some historical data about the network, but very little about the man.

Years later, while assigned in Budapest (1977-1980) as US Defense and Army Attache, I was introduced to Rado at a diplomatic reception, and thereafter had an opportunity to converse with him on a number of occasions. The last time I saw Rado was in 1980, a year before he died, at the residence of the French Ambassador during the 14 July Bastille Day reception. He was elegantly attired as usual, lapel covered with decorations, radiating good humor.

I told Rado that I was being reassigned from Budapest, bade him farewell, and thanked him for sharing some of his reminiscences and vast knowledge of maps with me.<sup>1</sup> I questioned Rado again (he had always changed the subject in past conversations) concerning his post-war adventures. "Professor Rado, will we ever know the complete story of the Dora network? What happened to you in the Soviet Union after 1945? What about your ten years in the Lubjanka prison? Was that not a strange reward for someone who did so much for the Soviet war effort?" Rado pursed his lips, folded his hands across his generous paunch, and replied, "I wrote a book; you have seen it—*Dora Jelenti* (Codename Dora). Others have also written books all of which tell of many things. It is enough for everyone to know that I worked in a common cause with all those who were fighting against Hitler—all of the accounts agree on this, if nothing else. I hope I will be remembered mostly for my contributions to geographical science."

<sup>1</sup> After our first meeting, I once complained to Rado about the inadequacy of the Hungarian *Autoatlasza* (book of road maps). Rado suggested that I acquire some newly published maps from a special map store in the city and gave me directions to find the store. For a brief time, until the map store manager informed me that foreigners were not allowed to make purchases, I was able to obtain new and detailed maps, charts, city plans, and similar useful and interesting documents.

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Rado

Rado undoubtedly made some significant contributions to the study of geography and cartography. Nevertheless, it is most likely that his activities as *Dora*, the spy, are what will secure his name in history.

### The Twig Is Bent

Sandor Rado was born in Budapest in 1899 into a middle-class family and pursued a traditional, classical education which was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War. Rado was mobilized into the Austro-Hungarian Army at the age of 17 as a junior staff officer in the artillery. Stationed in Budapest, he was able to continue his university education. During the turmoil following the end of World War I, Rado became a political activist and joined the communists. Under the leadership of Bela Kun, the communists overthrew the Social Democratic Republic established in 1918 under Count Karolyi and in power for less than a year. The Kun revolt then survived for only 133 days during which Rado served in the Red Army as a political officer. When the Kun government collapsed, according to Rado's account in his book, he fled for his life to Austria, not to return to his native Hungary for almost 37 years.<sup>2</sup>

In the fall of 1919, Rado entered the University of Vienna to begin the study of geography and cartography. At the end of the year he traveled to Moscow for work with the Comintern Secretariat and also to pursue his courtship of a young German communist, Helene Jansen, whom he had first met in Vienna. Helene Jansen was employed as a secretary to Lenin and Rado claimed to have had at least one conversation with Lenin. The young Rado directed Soviet intelligence and propaganda offices in the Swedish town of Haparanda on the Finnish border as well as in Vienna.

In late 1923, Sandor Rado and Helene Jansen were married in Moscow and then returned to Germany so that Rado could complete his studies.

The next year, he returned to the Soviet Union for training with Soviet military intelligence and was thereafter assigned to Berlin, under cover as an employee of the German company that published *Meyer's Lexicon*, and later as a cartographer with *Lufthansa*. During the 1930s Rado also did cartographic work in Stockholm for *Aerotransport*, the predecessor of *SAS-Scandinavian Airlines*. This assignment gave him access to defense information of Sweden and possibly some other countries.

Rado's publication of the first geographic atlas of the USSR in 1932 established him as a cartographic authority and on the strength of this he returned to Germany to work as a geographer for the *Almanach de Gotha*.

<sup>2</sup> One of Rado's contemporaries had a different account which suggests that Rado's departure was more romantic than political. When the Kun government collapsed, Rado and some Hungarian army friends were in the town of Győr and received orders to report back to Budapest to give their parole to support the newly established government and be demobilized from active military service. During an extended celebration that evening, Rado became acquainted with a young lady and left his pals to spend the night with her. Consequently, he overslept and failed to report to the formation for transport to Budapest. Hung over and frightened at the prospect of disciplinary action for being AWOL, Rado fled to Vienna and refused to return to Hungary. He also changed his name from the original Radolffy to Rado "to protect the family."

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In 1933, after Hitler came into power, the Rado family moved to Paris where Rado established a new venture, a press agency called *Inpress* which specialized in maps and geographic data pertaining to current events. This venture, founded with Soviet financial backing, employed more than a dozen people, including several Soviet agents who were able to use *Inpress* as a cover. The venture continued until 1935 when the Soviets decided that the operation could not become self-supporting and should be discontinued.

According to several accounts, Rado was directed by S. P. Ourisky, then director of Soviet Military Intelligence, to establish himself in Brussels. His attempts were thwarted by Belgian authorities and he moved to Geneva where he established a new firm, *Geopress*, patterned after *Inpress* but more successful commercially.

### The Dora Network

In April 1938, Rado's Soviet controller in Paris informed him that the Paris *residency* was to be closed and that Rado would become the *resident director* in Switzerland for Soviet Intelligence and would report directly to Moscow Central. The controller turned over his entire Swiss network to Rado. (Code-named *Dora*—an anagram of Rado).

Until the summer of 1939, Rado, with the secret Red Army rank of major general, was occupied with development and expansion of his agent net. He provided the Soviets with information concerning German preparations for the occupation of Danzig and other political and military activities. Once the Second World War broke out, Rado had to acquire radio communications. His search for communications and sources soon led him to Alexander Allan Foote who had been living in Switzerland as an expatriate Briton of independent means. Foote, who became Rado's assistant, had been involved with British Intelligence, mainly under direction of Lieutenant Colonel Sir Claude Dansey.<sup>3</sup> Rado acquired, through Foote's efforts, a radio transmitter and operators. Regular and considerable intelligence then began to flow to Moscow. There was some antagonism and competition between Rado and Foote for control of Soviet intelligence activity in Switzerland. This later would cause problems for both of them as Foote related in his book.

Rado provided high-quality intelligence to Moscow. For example, this transmission on 17 June 1941:

... For Director. About 100 infantry divisions are now positioned on the German-Soviet border. One-third are motorized. At least ten of the remaining divisions are armored. Divisions are concentrated in Romania at Galatz, and elite special mission divisions stationed in German occupied Poland are taking part. Dora.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Claude Edward Marjoribanks Dansey was born in 1876. He served in Africa as an officer in the Matabele and Zulu wars and as a reserve military intelligence officer in France during World War I. After the war he lived for a brief period in the United States where he failed in a business venture. Dansey returned to Britain and into the Intelligence Service. In the 1930s he established an intelligence operation known as the "Z" Organization, based in Switzerland. "Z" Organization (outside of, but paralleling SIS) was a peculiar establishment headed by a strange chief. Dansey, controversial, anti-intellectual, unpopular, and controversial, was believed by a few to be brilliant, but one of his erstwhile colleagues described him as "totally incompetent." For a review of a book about Dansey, see page 78 in this issue of *Studies*.

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Rado

At Moscow Center, the information from *Dora* was assessed as accurate along with similar information received from other sources. Unfortunately for the Soviets, Josef Stalin and his entourage did not believe any of it; they felt they had a clear and positive insight into Hitler's plans, and so the initial objectives for Hitler's *Operation Barbarossa* for the invasion of the Soviet Union were achieved. Those who had correctly reported the intelligence did not fare so well—several lost their lives, many lost their freedom. Rado, however, continued to operate from Switzerland and achieved new credibility with his professional masters for the accuracy of information provided by his network.

During World War II, Swiss counterintelligence and security authorities were occupied primarily with protecting Switzerland against hostile activities and violations of Swiss neutrality. Intelligence gathering which did not violate Swiss laws, provoke violence, or otherwise give cause for apprehension was noted by the authorities, but little interference resulted. German counterintelligence, on the other hand, largely as a result of investigative successes in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, was able to unravel a considerable part of the Moscow-run networks and, after 1942, knew a good deal about Rado and his communications system.

Through early 1943, the *Dora* network continued to function with mixed results. Rado was under continuous pressure from Moscow to equal or exceed his past successes. Finally, in April 1943, *Dora* was able to provide the Moscow Center with vital intelligence concerning the German salient at Kursk. Today, historians are in general agreement that the battle for Kursk was the decisive turning point in the war in the East. German victory, although unlikely, was still possible before Kursk. After Kursk, German defeat was certain.

When the Germans attacked Kursk on 5 July in *Operation Citadel*, General Rokossovsky and his forces, relying on intelligence from *Dora*, were able to anticipate German operations. By the beginning of August, the Kursk battle was concluded, and the Soviets could take to the offensive. After Kursk, Rado was awarded the Order of Lenin in 1943 (later revoked), but *Dora* never again achieved either the volume or quality of production that had characterized its performance since 1939. The overall situation for Rado and his net seemed to deteriorate as individual agents were picked up, codes were compromised, and sources appeared to become less productive. In October, it became obvious to Rado that he was in personal danger as the Swiss authorities had become more interested in his work. Shortly thereafter, Foote was arrested and jailed briefly by the Swiss.

#### Ordered to Moscow

In 1944, the Rados made their way to southern France and worked about six months with the French Resistance, work for which Rado was awarded the Legion of Honor. With help from the *Nicole* communist network, Rado went to Paris where he informed the Soviet Military Attache that the *Dora* network was finished in Switzerland. A short time later, Foote also arrived in Paris and reported to the Soviet Mission, but his account differed from Rado's in a number of details. Faced with the inconsistent reports, early in 1945 both Foote and Rado together with another Soviet agent, the redoubtable Leopold Trepper, were

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ordered to report to Moscow. Their Soviet aircraft was routed through Marseilles and Cairo. During the stopover in Cairo, Rado disappeared. During the summer of 1945 Rado, then hiding in Cairo, was turned over to the Soviets because he was traveling on a Soviet passport.<sup>4</sup>

He was flown immediately to Moscow and consigned to the Lubjanka prison. Rado remained in the Lubjanka for about 18 months and then, charged with espionage for the West, diversion of confidential funds, and compromise of secret communications, he was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment and stripped of all rank and honors.

His wife Helene had resisted Soviet pressures to come to the USSR, obtained a French divorce of convenience to forestall further pressures, and remained in Paris with their two sons.

As a prisoner, Rado was shifted to various sites, first in Siberia and later to Kuchino, near Moscow. He soon qualified as a "privileged prisoner" and reportedly worked in the geophysical observatory and on mapping and charting projects. Rado had some influential friends (among them Ferenc Munnich, one-time Hungarian Foreign Minister and an army comrade from the Bela Kun revolt) and their assistance undoubtedly played a part in his more lenient treatment as well as contributing to his release in a 1954-55 post-Stalin amnesty.

In 1955, Rado returned to Hungary after a long absence and soon after was engaged as deputy chief of the State Survey and Cartographic Office, specifically as head of the Cartographic Department. Arrangements were made for Helene to rejoin him and she moved to Budapest in 1956. Helene died in 1958 and lies beneath an imposing monument attesting to her lifelong dedication and service to communism.

According to all reports, Rado took no part in the 1956 Hungarian revolt, although this appears to have been by chance rather than design. Rado was a friend of Imre Nagy and many other major figures on both sides of the struggle. It is said he tried at the beginning of the uprising to get the opposing parties together but when his efforts failed, wisely, he let the matter drop. After the revolt, Rado apparently regained some favor with the Soviets and his career took an upturn. One report suggests that he was appointed chairman of the Warsaw Pact Committee on Mapping and Geodesy in 1957. Although this was never confirmed, it is clear that his power and prestige continued to increase and that the Hungarian mapping effort improved.

As the head of Hungarian geographic and cartographic activities, Rado continued to display the imagination and energy that had characterized his wartime work. The Hungarian geodesic journal, *Földmérés-tani Közlemények* (Periodical of Geodesy) underwent a name-change in 1955 to *Geodézia és Kartográfia* (Geodesy and Cartography) and incorporated a number of new features, such as a section on map changes, i.e., current data on countries, East

<sup>4</sup> Rado was originally apprehended by the Egyptian police operating under British direction. During his interrogation, Rado attempted to negotiate a defection to the British. His case was routinely reviewed by counterintelligence and apparently on the recommendation of CI (including one H.A.R. Philby) the defection was rejected as was Rado's effort to escape Soviet extradition on legal grounds.

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Rado

and West, listing civil divisions, place names, and other items of interest to cartographers. In 1962, Rado expanded the quarterly publication schedule to six issues per year and, in 1965, commenced publication in English, French, and German of a new quarterly, named *Cartactual*. (This presented no difficulty for Rado, who was fluent in at least six languages.)

*Cartactual* was a very clever collection device. For a \$10 subscription, (payable in hard currency) readers obtained maps designed for ease in reproduction, illustrations of significant map changes, and related data, all obtained from open sources by Rado's organization which contributed the search, selection, organization, illustration, and publication. A normal issue contained perhaps two or three maps of communist countries and about two dozen from the West. Rado, on the other hand, obtained an extensive and systematically organized file of Western data (which the East could use to keep its maps accurate and up-to-date), a plausible basis for close contact with Western sources (and a potential for their recruitment), and considerable prestige as a world clearing house for geographic information.

Rado also developed numerous other collection schemes such as exchange agreements with official agencies and private organizations and geographic societies throughout the world. He established several joint ventures for map publication. A review of his activities made during the 1960s indicated that Rado's schemes were quite good for the Hungarians but a poor bargain for their partners.<sup>5</sup>

The sociable Sandor Rado never passed up the opportunity to attend international conferences. He attended conferences in Bloc countries, in Mexico City, Havana, Western Europe, and in Asia. In 1967, Rado almost became vice president of the International Cartographic Association (ICA), a position which normally leads to the incumbent becoming president. With his reputation as a spy by that time well-known, his candidacy failed.

### Theories

A complete and accurate account of Rado's operations in war-time Switzerland is not to be found either in the hostile, selective, and self-aggrandizing memoirs of Foote or in Rado's own book. Records of the two prosecutions of Rudolf Roessler, (Codename *Lucy*) a German refugee living in Switzerland and one of *Dora*'s main sources, provide some helpful insights but are not credible as a basis for historical judgments. Rado's post-war adventures in the Soviet Union can be explained in the light of personalities and related events, but even the most thoroughgoing analysis of the confirmed and reliable factual evidence leaves us with three (possibly four) scenarios on *Dora* and *Lucy*.

*Theory 1* postulates that *Lucy*, probably *Dora*'s most important source, received his significant intelligence from four sub-sources in Germany, mainly from individuals in the anti-Nazi movement in the German General Staff.

*Theory 2* holds that *Lucy* was really not much more than a "front" for Swiss Intelligence, operating through "Bureau Ha" (Colonel Haussaman) as a cutout

<sup>5</sup> It has been suggested that this scheme was more a characteristic of traditional Hungarian bargaining than clandestine collection. There is an old Central European saying that a Hungarian is someone who follows you into a revolving door and comes out in front. Maybe Rado's operations were a bit of both.

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Rado

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in order to pass intelligence gained through their collection inside Germany to the Allies without compromising Swiss neutrality.

*Theory 3*, of more recent vintage, claims that the British, through Colonel Dansey's network, used Foote (the assistant and principal radio operator for *Dora*) to pass sanitized and disguised ULTRA-derived intelligence to the Soviets in a manner which would be credible and conceal the source.

The possible *fourth theory* holds that the *Lucy* traffic dispatched to the Western allies went from Swiss Intelligence through a Czechoslovak colonel, Karel Sedlacek (codenamed *Uncle Tom*). In support of this theory, it is argued that Sedlacek obtained his information from Colonel Haussaman, who had obtained it from *Lucy*, who then determined which intelligence was to go to the diverse recipients, i.e., East or West. Alternatively, it has been claimed that Sedlacek obtained the intelligence from Haussaman for dispatch direct to London.

Some insight into Rado's 1945 attempt to escape returning to Moscow was provided in 1975 by the publication in France of the memoirs of Leopold Trepper, leader of *The Red Orchestra*, the Soviet intelligence network which operated during World War II in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and Germany. Trepper, recalling his flight from Paris to Moscow, wrote:

While we were flying toward Moscow, Rado's disappearance (in Cairo) obsessed me. I knew he had performed his mission beyond all expectation, that he had nothing to reproach himself for . . . In Switzerland, he had contributed substantially to the victory, but because of his profound understanding of the facts, his realism as a man of learning, he felt in spite of victory, nothing had changed in the kingdom of the OGPU (KGB). He foresaw the fate that awaited him in Moscow. He did not care for the prospect of ending his life in one of Stalin's jails; hence he disappeared in Cairo after making sure his wife and children were safe in Paris.

Trepper himself was not so fortunate. As he related, "The truth Rado perceived did not strike me with its blinding light until later. I was too naive."<sup>6</sup>

A contributing factor to Rado's treatment in the Soviet Union could be the personal hostility of Lavrenti Beria, KGB Chief. It is reported that during the Second World War, Beria's son, a playboy type, was stationed in Switzerland to work in Rado's net and avoid combat service. The son reportedly squandered operational funds, compromised security, and accomplished nothing useful. Rado had him recalled to the Soviet Union where he was eventually killed in action with the Red Army. Another possible factor was that Rado, together with many others, had been directed by Soviet Intelligence General Berzin. When Berzin was purged by Stalin, anyone who had been associated with him came under suspicion.

<sup>6</sup> Trepper paid for his naivete with more than ten years in prison in the Lubjanka and Lefortovo. He was released after Stalin's death and permitted to live under house arrest in Poland. After intense Western pressure, he was allowed to emigrate first to England and later to France.

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Rado

Rado's status as a "privileged prisoner" was alleged to have resulted from an administrative error, although there are indications that the "error" occurred as a result of efforts made by influential friends. It is known that Rado was released from prisoner status in 1954 but remained in the Soviet Union for about a year trying to negotiate his citizenship status. His negotiations were difficult and protracted and his refusal to accept a choice of professorships in the Soviet Union did not help. Apparently the intercession of his old friend Munnich and the overthrow of Beria combined to hasten the departure of Rado for Budapest with Khrushchev's blessing.

The various theories postulated as to *Dora's* sources are more difficult to reconcile. The Soviets initially took the position that *Dora's* sources inside Germany (which, primarily, were those of *Lucy*) were all communists. When they were unable to sustain this position in the light of hard evidence adduced, particularly during Roessler's first apprehension and trial, they shifted their argument to hold that the *Lucy* sources were not individuals, but were institutional sources and, above all, that they were completely unrelated to members of the anti-Nazi Twentieth of July Group, the dominant branch of which was unquestionably pro-Western, not pro-Soviet. Detailed analysis of traffic between *Dora* and Moscow and with *Lucy*, when considered against the background of other information, strongly suggests that German military sources fed *Lucy* through Swiss Intelligence, in *Switzerland*. This is to say that the intelligence was communicated through German military (*Abwehr*-counterintelligence) channels. The *Abwehr* channels were relatively secure until the failure of the 20 July plot and Swiss communications were demonstrably less so. (If the *Abwehr* communications were not secure, the plotters probably would have been rolled up prior to 20 July.) The "Bureau Ha" appears to have been established by Swiss authorities to provide key intelligence from Germany to the British through Sedlacek (*Uncle Tom*) and to the Soviets through *Dora*, while maintaining Swiss neutrality. Roessler (*Lucy*), even in his published memoirs, revealed very little which could delineate the operation with precision.

The argument that the British employed the *Dora* network (through Foote) with intelligence derived from ULTRA intercepts in order to ensure that the material reached the Soviets without compromising the real source is difficult to sustain. Some of the intelligence could have originated from ULTRA and certainly much of the Kursk-related data transmitted by Rado are difficult to relate to another source. This argument is supported by the strange career of Foote, his lengthy relationship with Colonel Dansey, and the support and government employment afforded Foote when he returned to Britain. The British established a UK-Soviet liaison mission in Moscow after the Kursk battle and if *Dora* had been utilized as a conduit earlier, certainly with the liaison mission functioning, it was no longer necessary to use Rado/Foote as a channel. There is really no hard evidence to support the ULTRA theory, plausible though it may be.

The Swiss are unlikely to reveal their role in the operations discussed above; they have a great interest in preserving their position as neutrals, and there is no discernible advantage to them to lay open the record. German records

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captured by the Soviets, together with detailed interrogations of some of the principals, would very likely reveal a considerable amount of information about the *Lucy* sources, but the possibility of revelations from the USSR are remote.

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The objective of Rado's war-time mission—defeat of Hitler—was achieved and the little pear-shaped professor has secured a place for himself in history. His status is not as he would have preferred, as a cartographer and geographer, dedicated to the advancement of geodesic science, but rather as an individual caught up in the history of his time, involved in an epic struggle between great powers—as a spy.

From my own observations of Rado, I conclude that he had what it takes to be a great collector of intelligence. He had an ingratiating personality, a brilliant mind with a well-developed imagination, and a capacity for hard work. Because he was an internationally recognized expert in his chosen specialty, many doors were open to him and he never passed up an opportunity to walk right in.

In Western traditions, there are Valhallas for the fallen warrior; cavalrymen have their Fiddler's Green and sailors, Davy Jones's locker. I suspect Professor Sandor Rado might yet be charming his listeners and telling jokes in six languages in some special place for old spies, a place whose name and location, of course, cannot be revealed.

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